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VOLUME 9 NO. 1



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FOR THE BENEFIT OF MR. BECKER



This past June 19, *GUITAR For the Practicing Musician* sponsored a concert and some very good people got together and played for a very good reason: to provide Jason Becker with some financial help in his fight against ALS (Donations can be sent to Jason Becker, P.O. Box 5109 Richmond, CA 94805). The idea for a benefit started with Jason's friend, Lori Barker. She enlisted Mike Varney to be the M.C., and he called in some of L.A.'s best up-and-coming rock acts to start the show. They included 9.0, Jeff Pilson's War and Peace, and Eyes, with Jeff Scott Soto. On behalf of *GUITAR*, I got the word out to the rock guitar community that a fellow musician was in need, and the responses were swift, heartfelt and affirmative.

BY
JOHN
STIX

PHOTOGRAPHS
BY
ROSS
PELTON

THE PRACTICING MUSICIAN JAM SESSION

It was an emotional night for Jason and his entire family, who flew in for the concert. Throughout the night, everything that could go right did go right. The music was top notch, and the spirit of the audience and the players assembled at the Club Excess in Glendale, California was high and energized.

The sets were restricted to 20 minutes each, with the opening jam featuring Alex Skolnick, Tony MacAlpine, Stu Hamm, Alma Anur and Richie Kotzen playing "The Boys Are Back in Town," "Can't Get Enough," "Alright Now" and "Snort Whiskey." Next up was Becker's David Lee Roth cohort, Steve Hunter, with his band and special guest George Lynch. They were followed by Zakk Wylde, Vivian Campbell, Thomas McRocklin, Randy Coven and Ray Luzier (9.0) playing "Tie Your Mother Down," "Immigrant Song," "The Ocean," "Messin' with the Kid" and "One Way Out." Jeff Watson did a short acoustic set and was followed by Steve Lukather, Warren DiMartini, Bruce Kulick, Stu Hamm and Jonathan Mover doing "Little Wing" and "Crossroads." Steve Lukather, Jonathan Mover and Michael Anthony did "You Really Got Me" and "Rock and Roll," with the addition of Jeff Scott Soto and Richie Kotzen. The night concluded with Zakk Wylde, Richie Kotzen, bass player Tommy Hendrickson (War and Peace) and drummer Ray Luzier doing "Midnight Rider" and "Jesus Just Left Chicago."

With so many great guitarists all in one room, *GUITAR* took the liberty of informally polling each of them about their early experiences with their instrument.

GEORGE LYNCH

When I was a kid in camp, I had a broom, and that was my guitar. I'd sit there and rock out with this thing and go through all the motions. I think a lot of times just going through the motions in your head is like semi-practicing. You visualize yourself doing it. I just had a lot of music in my head. The first song I ever learned was "Malaguena." My dad made me sit down and learn it off an 8-track tape and play it for all my relatives. I broke down and cried, because I couldn't pull it off. He thought it was great, but I was in tears. My first big song was "Rock My Plimsoul." It's a Willie Dixon song, off the *Truth* album. My first gig was Southgate High, a big auditorium



with maybe 800 people. It was a battle of the bands. I was playing with older guys of 17, 18, who were more experienced, doing Zeppelin cover songs. The curtain opened, and my parents were there, my friends, my family, and I froze. They started playing, and I totally lost it. They wound up kicking me out of the band. I was disgraced in my neighborhood. My parents were ashamed of me. I made a resolve at that point to be able to actually get up there and do it without tripping over my own feet.

STEVE HUNTER

I started off playing a lap-steel, so one of the first songs I learned was an Hawaiian song, like "Aloha-hoi," when I was eight, playing for the family, and at weddings. My father plays guitar, too, so it was me and my father. We would sit there, pull out the music—because I could read steel guitar music—and we'd play steel guitar, Hawaiian tunes and country & western tunes. It was a big deal, although, at the time, I wanted to be outside playing with everybody else.

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE: (From left) James Lomenzo, Greg D'Angelo, George Lynch, Eric Martin, Steve Lukather.







left to right

TOP ROW:

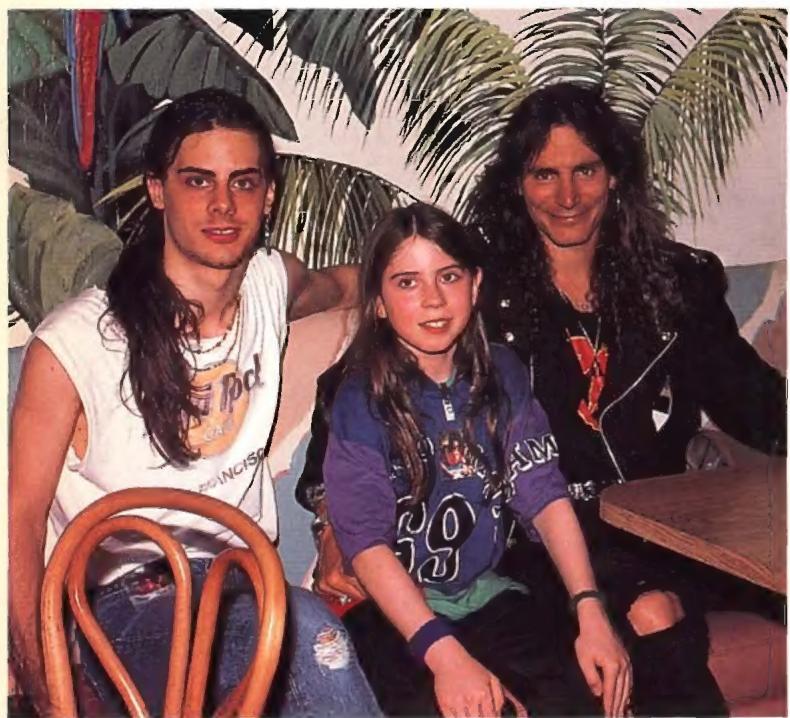
Craig Small
Steve Lukather
Tony MacAlpine
George Lynch
Vivian Campbell
Bruce Kulick
Warren DeMartini
Randy Coven
Jeff Watson

BOTTOM ROW:

Steve Hunter
Thomas McRocklin
Richie Kotzen
Jason Becker
Alex Skolnick
Zakk Wylde
Stu Hamm

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FOR THE BENEFIT OF MR. BECKER



UP ALL NIGHT: Young Thomas McRocklin, Steve Vai (R) and Richie Kotzen (L).

One of my favorite early experiences was one time in high school, when I did an assembly with the stage band, and we did the *Batman* theme song and got a standing ovation. That was a major big deal for a stage band to play this kind of pop tune. It was pretty exciting. That had never happened to me before. My first major gig was actually me and my father. We played on a live local television show with Homer & Jethro, when I was nine years old. That was a trip. It was the most scared that I ever felt in my life.

WARREN DIMARTINI

The reason I wanted a guitar is because my brother took me to see the Who. Not being able to get it together then, because I was six or seven years old, I ended up smashing the guitar, and consequently didn't play again till I was 15. The first song I learned was "Sunshine of Your Love," off *Live Cream*. I was still living in Chicago. Later on, it was "Train Kept a-Rollin'," 'cause I figured the major barre chord out from the Fender poster that has the acoustic guitar on it. It happened to be in G and I went, "Wow, this sounds familiar," and I just moved it around till it worked.

On our first major gig, my high school band was to play was this big beach party on the 4th of July. Every summer they had a sea wall filled eight feet high with sand, and bands would set up and play there. We got on that show and that was probably the biggest crowd I'd ever played to. But, since the stage was made with sand, when I tried jumping onto the drum riser, my jump wasn't high enough, because of the sand, and I ended up crashing into the drums, knocking all this stuff

over and screwing up my guitar. I had borrowed all this equipment from everybody I knew. I had three stacks, six cabinets going, three 100 watt heads going, and I couldn't hear anybody but me anyway. It was a nightmare.

JASON BECKER

The first song I ever learned was "Buckets of Rain," by Robert Zimmerman. When I was little, I was singing Bob Dylan songs on acoustic guitar, and when relatives came over, I'd play a song, and afterwards everyone would go, "Yes, isn't that very good? That's very good; that's nice." And my dad would go, "No, that sucks! There's no heart, no passion, no nothing! Why don't you try it again!" And I'd be sitting there with my head hanging, and everyone saying, "Leave him alone; he's doing fine!" But it's a good thing he didn't, 'cause otherwise I'd have sucked forever.

Later I remember doing the poseur thing, playing this big guitar solo for this newspaper boy convention, where they give the awards. So I played solos and some hammer-ons and real fast picking. At the end, I was gonna throw my guitar up, and it was gonna come down and I'd catch it and be real cool. But it hooked onto something above the stage and just stayed up in the air. I threw it up and it never came down! So I just left it there. I had to say to someone, "Jump up and get it for me."

RICHIE KOTZEN

Before I could play, we had a jukebox in our house, and I had kind of like a little stage in a room. It was a shelf and I just had enough room to stand up. I'd play the jukebox and I'd pretend to be singing. I had a friend who had a snare drum and a kick drum, who'd get behind that and pretend he was playing along, and I'd invite my friends over. I was always singing when I was little. Finally, my parents suggested I take piano lessons.

The first song I ever tried to learn was "Purple Haze." I learned the right notes, but I played it in the open position. My mom was this big Hendrix fan, and she would listen to me practicing, and I'd come running up to her, "Listen, I can play 'Purple Haze,' I can

Continued

IS THAT A GUITAR IN YOUR HAND, OR ARE YOU JUST GLAD TO SEE ME: Zakk Wylde (R) and Steve Lukather.



THE PRACTICING MUSICIAN JAM SESSION

play 'Purple Haze!'" And she'd be like, "Wait a second, that sounds nothing like 'Purple Haze!'" The notes were right, but just the wrong positioning. It took me a few years to figure that out.

When I was in my cover band, I used to do a lot of tricks with my guitar, like throw it around, spin it, and that kind of thing. So, one time I spun the guitar, and the guitar flew up and did a little bounce thing. I didn't know what else to do, so I picked the thing up and did the helicopter trip, and it was wild. But then I realized that if it would have flipped off, I definitely would have killed somebody, and that's how I would've been remembered, instead of for my guitar playing.

BRUCE KULICK

My first song was the Dave Clark Five's "Bits and Pieces," 'cause it had two chords: C and F. I remember being excused from class to be able to do a 'show and tell' kind of thing in the school auditorium. I actually plugged in with a big amp and jammed. I remember I had a sparkle-type strap that would reflect the lights, and that was very impressive, more impressive than the music. That was a thrill, especially cutting class to do it.

I remember quite a few early times, when I'd drive to the gig and there was no gig. The agent would send us to a place on Long Island and the guy didn't want the band at all—and I'd driven an

hour and a half out to the edge of Long Island to find out the news. That wasn't too thrilling.

Once, when I was backing up George McCrae, who was this huge disco artist in Germany, we were at, like, a Grammy awards, which he was gonna receive. The record guy tells us, "You'll be on in about a half hour." So I took the opportunity to go to the bathroom. Next thing you know, they announce him! They have a whole orchestra onstage that we're supposed to perform with. Five minutes later, they were still waiting for the band to perform onstage in front of 15,000 people, and live on European radio. That was learning the hard way never to believe anybody telling you it's a half hour till you go on. I remember hearing the radio broadcast the next day. You can hear the crowd going, 'Huh? What's happening,' and then you actually hear me plug in my guitar and start the song, "Rock Your Baby." It was really funny.

JEFF WATSON

I did "Tom Dooley" for my mom and dad on a little Stella guitar when I was six or seven years old. I actually did it at a talent show about that time. I don't want to date myself, but when I started there weren't that many guitar heroes out. I used to go around the neighborhood with my sister, who was a year younger than me, and my two cousins, Barbie and Curt. We would knock on peoples' doors and sing Christmas carols. That was my early touring experience. I made a fortune.

I didn't get an electric guitar till I was out of high school. I was playing lead guitar on a Yamaha acoustic 12-string, and I joined a band with a bunch of guys who were juniors and seniors, and I was a sophomore, so it didn't work. After I got out of high school, I decided I was gonna get serious. When I first got the electric, I learned "Day Tripper." Then I took some of what I learned doing the 12-string. My left hand was pretty strong because of bending two strings all the time. So I got my vibrato down right away and I started listening to people like Johnny Winter, Shuggie Otis, and Ritchie Blackmore.

TONY MACALPINE

The time that I got to play guitar was used very seriously, because my parents didn't want me to screw around with improvising, because they were paying for these piano lessons. I learned a bunch of tunes, like "Johnny B. Goode." My brother worked out the hard stuff for me. I started playing along with Johnny Winter. I never played air guitar. I take that back. Once, while I was doing my guitar solo, while I had my hand

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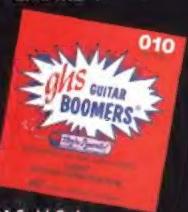


Photo courtesy of Ross Halfin

up in the air, my guitar cabinet unplugged, so I had no sound—hence, air guitar!

The most embarrassing time I ever had was just recently. We were playing, and I tried to make this jump to the drum riser, and I didn't make it. I wound up grabbing the cymbals and taking the drum set apart. Once, we played this show in a club in South Hadley, MA, that's called Scrimshaw's. 500 people came and saw us play all these cover tunes, and the owner gets up onstage and he's screaming, "How many of you are gonna come out and see these guys next time?" And naturally everybody's a little bit drunk, so they said, "Yeah, we'll come out the next time and see them."

So, who comes out next time? Tina, her mother, and her brother, and that's about it.

THOMAS McROCKLIN

The first song I learned was Thin Lizzy's "The Boys Are Back in Town." When I first started off playing guitar, my dad would go to work, and I used to get his guitar. When my dad came in, he'd say, "What's my guitar doin' on the floor? Someone's been playin' it!" Once, I put the guitar behind my back, behind my head, and I dropped it, and it went, 'Smash!'

ALEX SKOLNICK

My first song was Ringo Starr in the

Beatles doing "Act Naturally," which is the same riff as "Skip to My Lou." So I started out with "Skip to My Lou," but progressed to "Act Naturally" within two weeks. When I was about 10, there were a couple times when I was sitting at my window singing Beatles at the top of my lungs. I stopped, and my parents were down there cheering, and I died with embarrassment. I dressed up as Paul Stanley for Halloween because I could do the star on my face. In junior high school, I had a band that did U.F.O., the B-52's and AC/DC. It was an interesting combination. My first real band was Testament, which I joined when I was in the 11th grade. It was a complete band and I had to learn the songs quickly. Of course, I was terrified at the first couple gigs. I was still going to school during the day, but doing these gigs at night. My hands would shake during the slow parts. Having to learn on the job really helped get me a long way.

STU HAMM

I was a 12-year-old, pudgy, red-haired geek and my hero was Danny Partridge, because he was a 14-year-old, pudgy, red-haired geek. Danny was such an underrated bass player. You look at the old shows, the bass line's going down and his left hand is just clenched around the neck! I've practiced my whole life, and I still have to move my left hand up and down the neck.

I started off playing piano, and whenever my mom would take me to visit relatives, I would look, and she'd hidden the *Elton John Songbook* in her purse! The first song I ever wrote, I performed for my 6th grade English class. I played an acoustic guitar that had little smiley faces all over it, and it went, "If only they could see the real me/if only they could see what's really inside me. If only they could see the real me/maybe they would change things for a while. Maybe it would change things for a day or so. . . ." I mean, I was totally dramatic, even back then.

My first bass was a big red one. I got *Mel Bay's Easy Bass Method*, and started off playing in high school jazz bands. When I was 18, after one semester at Berklee, I went on the road with an Elvis impersonator. In the 40 dance sets we did a night, I used to don a lime-green jumpsuit, put down the bass, and do the Village People medley, like getting the whole crowd doing jumping jacks and stuff to "YMCA." That was pretty good. That's up there.

RANDY COVEN

I played drums and my brother played guitar, and my parents made us perform on Thanksgiving. Of course, they thought we were gonna sing. But

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we were playing fusion at age eight. We thought we were playing Beatles songs.

I got kicked out of a band in 6th grade because I was a show-off. I was playing the cymbals and I stood up on the cymbal riser and smashed the cymbals at the end of "The Star Spangled Banner," and the bandleader kicked me out of the band, and I went home crying. The first song I learned on bass was "Crossroads," by Cream. Somebody played it for me, and I was just blown away. He was playing with the record, and I said, "This is totally cool. Show it to me." When I was only playing for two weeks, I got into an all-Hendrix band. The guitar player taught me how to play, but he never taught me to tune up. So he would tune it up for me.

ZAKK WYLDE

The first song I ever learned must have been either "Smoke on the Water" or "Iron Man," because you can play the melody on the E string. Most of the time, I'd play a lot of Sabbath stuff. I'd sit in front of the mirror and make believe. My sister always caught me either having a wank or playing air guitar.

I remember we played at this girl's house, and her mother had sold the house. She said, "My mom and dad are out of town. I'll pay you forty bucks to come play." She invited half the high



Ross Pelton

Van Halen's Michael Anthony (L) and GUITAR's John Stix hold the night's grand prize, a fully autographed Peavey guitar.

school. Every bad-ass in the school was there. There was a torrential downpour the night of the party. The house was sold, so there was no furniture in it, just carpeting. Everyone was dragging mud onto the carpeting, up and down the stairs. There were endless kegs. Closets were knocked in. The house was ruined. I was there when her parents walked in

the house, 'cause we were unloading, and they freaked out. My friend Tom had a 4-wheel drive, and when he left, he rode his car right across the wet lawn, and ran over the 'sold' sign. It was good fun for us. We didn't have to pay for anything.

STEVE LUKATHER

My first song was "Dirty Water," by the Standells. I thought it was pretty cool, because like there was nobody on my block who could play. I was seven years old at the time. I used to hate playing for my relatives. My mother would say, "Go ahead and play that nice song you know." It was "The House of the Rising Sun." I dug the fact that they didn't get it.

The Beatles started me playing. Then it was the Stones, and then Cream, and Hendrix. I was way into Hendrix. Still am. I was in a band with Mike Landau, myself, Steve Pocaro, Carlos Vega, John Piersol—guys who are working a lot now. We used to do Mahavishnu tunes at high school dances, and watch people dance to "Birds of Fire," and stuff like that. They wouldn't know where the "1" was. They'd be trying to dance in 7 or 9. I remember the police coming to my parents' house on a regular basis, 'cause they could hear us two miles away.

On one of our first tours of Japan, we were playing the Budokan, and they were filming it live. I jumped up on a piano and I jumped down, except I didn't land on my legs, I landed on my knees, and the camera was right in my face, with the red light blazing. The look of agony on my face was beyond description. I used to do that all the time. It's like you go out live, onstage, and it's a big downbeat, and you have a wire-

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less on, and you haven't plugged your guitar in. It's just like *Spinal Tap*.

CRAIG SMALL

My first actual song was probably the Allman Brothers tune "Whippin' Post," and later I progressed to Robin Trower stuff. I saw Kiss in '77 at the Forum. It was the *Alive II* record. That was my very first show, and my mom and dad took me. It was in the nosebleed seats, but I took binoculars and never missed a second. My older brother was a drummer. He first acquired a guitar in his teens, and I was maybe five years old, and just started playing around with it, twanging it, not really knowing what's going on. I just banged around with it till about eight or nine, then started to pick stuff off TV themes. I remember my mom made me play "Hava Nagilah" at my Bar Mitzvah. That was quite a feat. In junior high and high school, I did "Dazed and Confused," doing the whole violin bow thing.

VIVIAN CAMPBELL

I was 13 years old and in love with these two identical twins. I went over to their house one Saturday afternoon, and their mother played classical guitar, and she showed me "Day Tripper." It was a very embarrassing experience, being taught by your girlfriend's mother, but it was the first riff I learned.

I pretended to be Marc Bolan for a long time. I just loved the way he looked, with the Les Paul by the knees, so I used to play air guitar in front of the mirror with a tennis racquet. Before I could play the guitar, I used to get up on the kitchen table with a little plastic red and white guitar that had six strings and give little concerts on the kitchen table.

When I was 14, I wanted to earn some money, so I replied to this ad in the paper for a dance band/show band thing that wanted a lead guitar player. I lied about my age and told them I was 17. They wore suits, so I went there, and they had the suits from the last guy. I had to turn the pants up four times. I used to wear a yellow shirt that was too big for me, and a waistcoat that looked like an overcoat, and I got up there and we'd play covers of Elvis and ABBA. I didn't know any of the songs, but the rhythm guitar player would turn around and yell out the chords to me or tell me to take a solo. I had a Telecaster and a fuzz box and every time he yelled, "Take a solo," I'd hit the fuzz box and start playing the solo. But I didn't realize at the time the difference between major and minor keys, and I only played minor, 'cause that was rock 'n' roll. They fired me after about a month, which was as soon as they could get someone else who could play in a major key. □